

Treasures

FROM THE CHARLES & GLENNA CAMPBELL COLLECTION



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Information drawn from *The Accidental Dealer*, by Peter Steinhart; *Chestnut Street Stomp*, by Charles Strong
and an oral history of Charles Campbell conducted by Joan Bossart in the collection of the Bancroft Library in Berkeley

Special thanks to Claire Carlevaro, Barbara Janeff and Matt Gonzalez

COVER
GLENN A PUTT, *Charlie Listening to Music*, 2000

PUBLISHED BY

THOMAS REYNOLDS GALLERY
WWW . THOMASREYNOLDS . COM

2291 Pine Street at Fillmore ■ San Francisco, CA 94115 ■ 415.441.4093



Charles and Glenna Putt Campbell, April 2012

A FRIENDLY, MELLOW MAGIC SHOP

AFTER AN ADVENTUROUS childhood in Siberia and Shanghai, followed by college and military service in Southern California, Charles Campbell moved north to San Francisco in 1947 and opened the Louvre framing and art supply store near the California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute. Art students on the GI Bill — David Park, Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn and many others — used his shop for supplies and socializing, sometimes trading a drawing for a tube of rare French oil paint. Framing for the major local museums provided a hands-on art education.

When he came to San Francisco, “All I knew about art was Art Tatum,” says Campbell, who had been the legendary blind pianist’s driver for a time in L.A. He was mad for jazz, and relished being part of the post-war creative boom in the haunts of North Beach. At night he managed Turk Murphy’s band at the Italian Village and palled around with traditional jazz types like Lu Watters.

By 1950, Campbell had begun hanging occasional shows of local artists in the Louvre’s front room. He was an early advocate of Bay Area Figurative work, which was evocative of place and rich with human connection. He learned to trust his instincts, showed and collected what moved him, and befriended many artists and collectors.

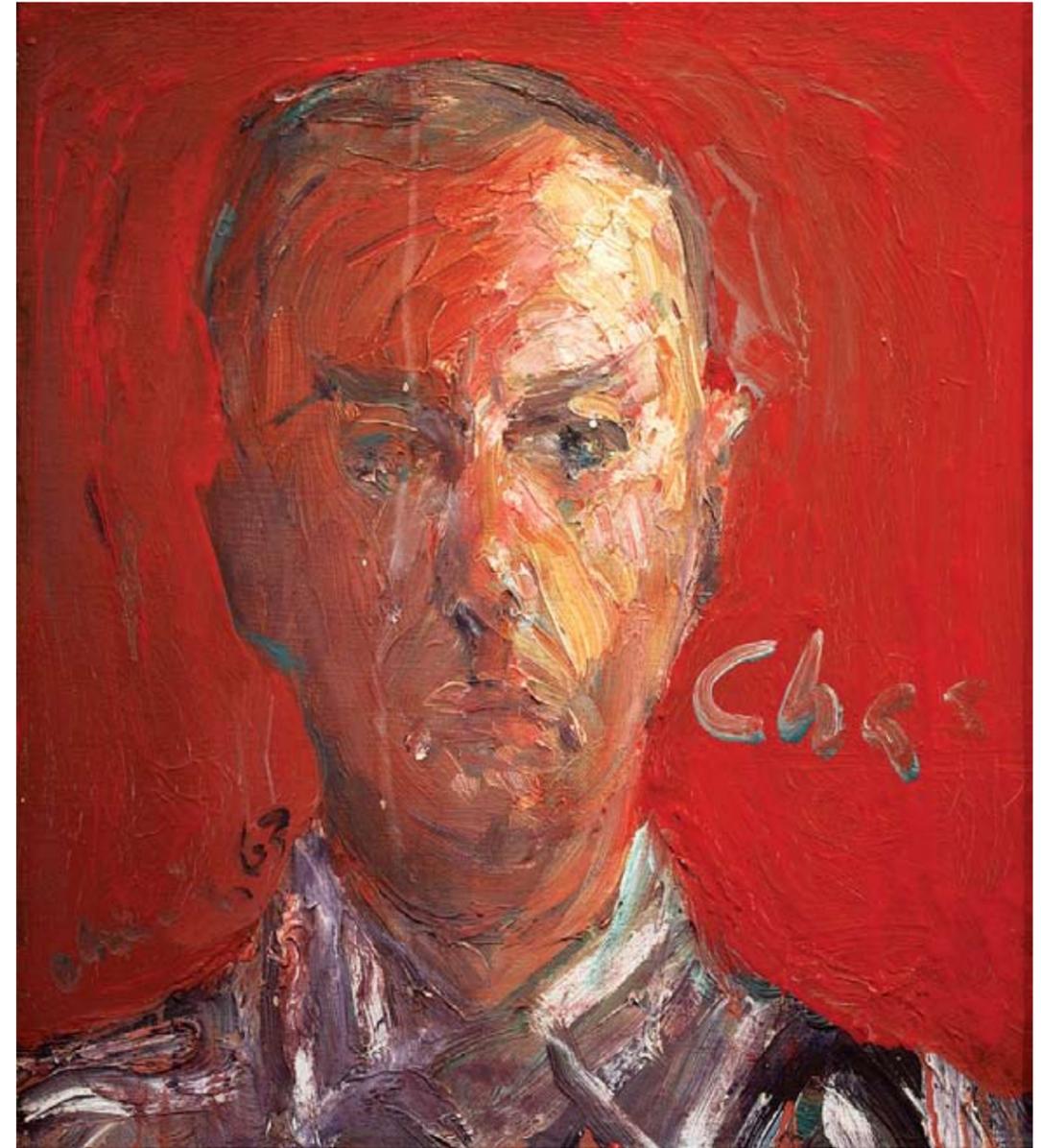
At a new location a block east, he launched the Charles Campbell Gallery in 1972. Soon the gallery would become an important destination, showing Bay Area Figurative painters Nathan Oliveira, Paul Wonner, Theophilus Brown, James Weeks and Joan Brown. Later he partnered with Paul Thiebaud and showed Manuel Neri, Wayne Thiebaud, Richard Diebenkorn and others. He also showed the largely forgotten paintings of the Society of Six, American Indian artifacts, East Indian miniatures, pre-Columbian ceramics, Day of the Dead folk art — whatever he fancied, and he fancied many things. It was a friendly, mellow magic shop with a large sofa in the front gallery and a back room filled with treasures where Campbell could be found midday having Chinese noodles and beer for lunch. It was a comfortable place with real art, juicy conversation and fun openings and after parties.

Everyone entering the gallery was treated equally, with no sales pitch. Lovingly chosen art well displayed sold itself, helped along by handsome catalogs designed by Campbell’s wife, the artist Glenna Putt. Anyone could rummage around the back room and find something special — perhaps a Dorothea Lange photograph or a Balthus drawing. Many could buy only on time, and that was fine. There were no credit checks, only a handshake and trust. No one ever failed to pay. Charles Campbell’s gallery was the real deal in a flashy world.

He continues living his charmed life, trusting his instincts, improvising as he goes along, like his friends in art and jazz.

Really the first artist I started handling almost exclusively was Nate Oliveira. He was teaching lithography at the school. He would bring me watercolors and prints and gouaches. So Oliveira was the first artist I took on, but not to give exhibitions. I didn't have that kind of space. I was selling watercolors and those marvelous things from '60 and '61 from the frame shop.

In 1967, with some with finagling, I was able to buy the property at 645-647 Chestnut Street. It was the luckiest move I ever made. Then around 1970 three or four of those guys — Robert Harvey, a painter who had been working with me in the frame shop for years, and Nathan Oliveira, and a couple of other guys — said, "Why don't you convert that upper floor into a gallery and we'll come and show with you." So I remodeled the space from a six-room apartment into a gallery. I opened in January 1972 with an Oliveira show. For about eight years I was Oliveira's main dealer and it was great. He was selling everything.



NATHAN OLIVEIRA, *Chas*, 1963, oil on canvas, 16 x 14 inches



NATHAN OLIVEIRA, *Woman With High Heels*, 1960, watercolor, 26 x 20 inches

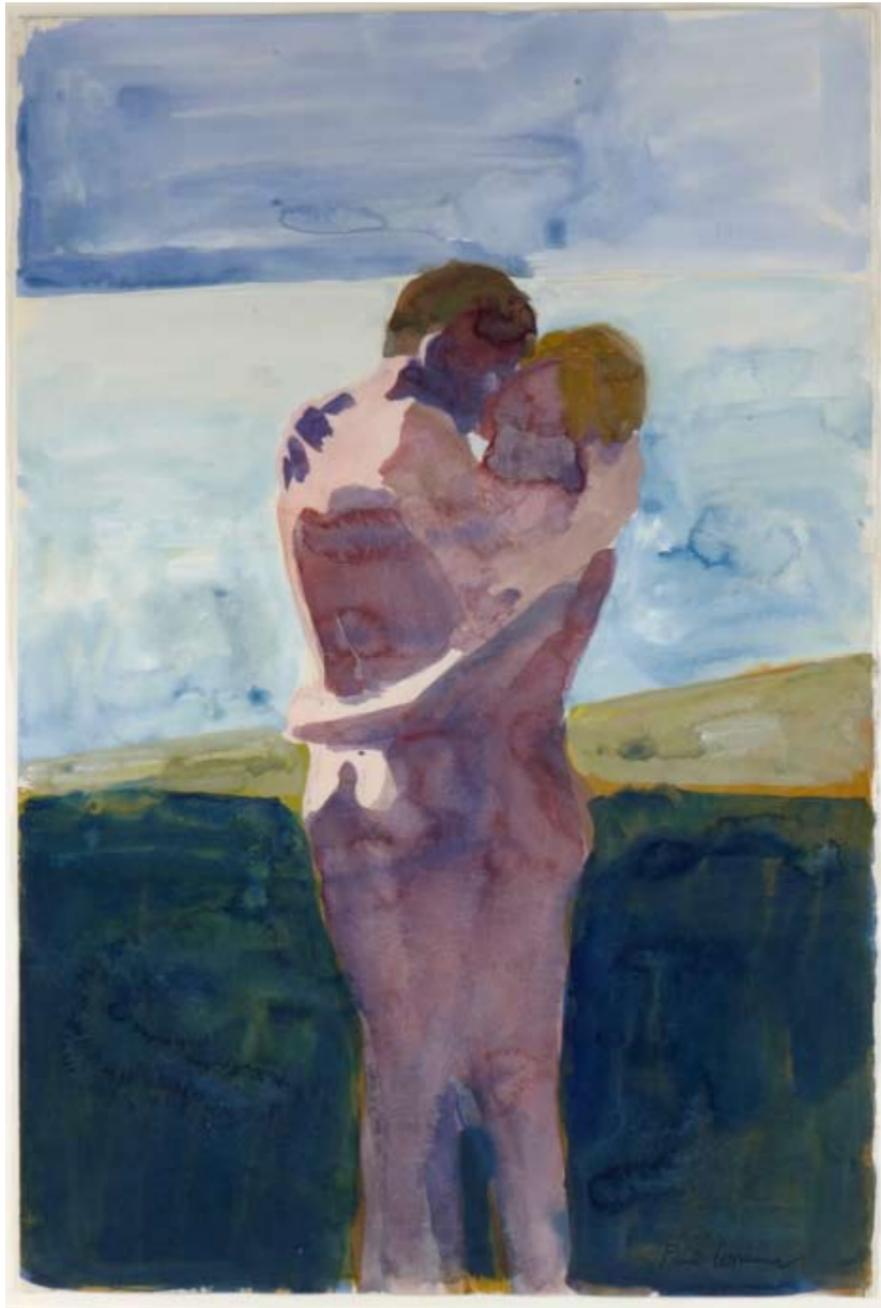


NATHAN OLIVEIRA, *Seated Woman*, 1961, watercolor and pencil, 9.75 x 7.5 inches



I met Bill Brown and Paul Wonner when I had the frame shop. They were living in an apartment on Mason Street. I did some framing for them. I said, "I'd like to trade with you." I did some framing for Paul at that time and got a gouache for doing some work. It was my first Paul Wonner. Then they moved down south and I talked to them when I got the gallery started about showing them here. They were living in Santa Barbara. They agreed to do it because they didn't have a gallery in San Francisco.

PAUL WONNER, *Bill Sleeping*, 1960, watercolor and casein, 12 x 18 inches



PAUL WONNER, *Embracing Couple*, circa 1960, watercolor, 18 x 12 inches



PAUL WONNER, *Nude and Indian Rug*, 1961, oil on canvas, 42 x 60 inches

*“I met Charles almost 50 years ago at his Louvre frame shop
(and artists’ hangout). In those days he was my elder by a few years.
Now, however, 50 years later, Charlie is considerably younger than I am,
a fact which baffled me until I realized that, like the unicorn, Charles is
a fabulous creature in the guise of a human being, difficult to describe but
wonderful to know.”*

— WILLIAM THEOPHILUS BROWN



WILLIAM THEOPHILUS BROWN, *Couple*, circa 1960, mixed media on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches

A guy who used to work in the frame shop came in one day with a Diebenkorn drawing he'd been given in payment for some auto work he'd done for a woman. I said, "It's not signed. It's obviously a Diebenkorn, but it's not signed." He said, "I know, but the woman, the model, gave it to me."

Later Diebenkorn pulled the drawing out of a show at the art gallery at UC Santa Cruz because it had been damaged. Dick told me he went in and saw the show the day before the opening and he kept walking back and looking at it. He knew something was wrong with it. Finally he realized it had been cropped. It turned out it was a nude, a pose with legs spread wide apart, and she — the model or her husband — had cut off the bottom of the drawing

One day Dick and Phyllis Diebenkorn walked in and sat right here and he gave me a portfolio of about 20 drawings. He said, "Well, I can't sell you these drawings because I'm now with Marlborough. But I can trade." I said, "How about two drawings so I can get one for myself?" He said okay and started picking out stuff.

So the Diebenkorns are sitting there and I said, "Here's that bad drawing." I gave it to Dick and said, "You tear it up." He took it and said, "I don't feel I can tear it up." He gave it back to me and said, "You tear it up." I said, "I'm not going to tear it up." Phyllis grabbed it, tore it in half, and gave each of us half and we tore it up into little squares.



RICHARD DIEBENKORN, *Seated Nude*, 1964, ink wash drawing, 17 x 14 inches



When I started the gallery, I featured figurative art. In the late '60s and '70s, non-objective art was big. There was a lot of bad stuff around. A lot of galleries were showing it. Figurative painting was in a bad phase. It was just pooh-poohed. Diebenkorn had given it up, and Bischoff was going to give it up soon. In the art world, figurative art was down on the totem pole.

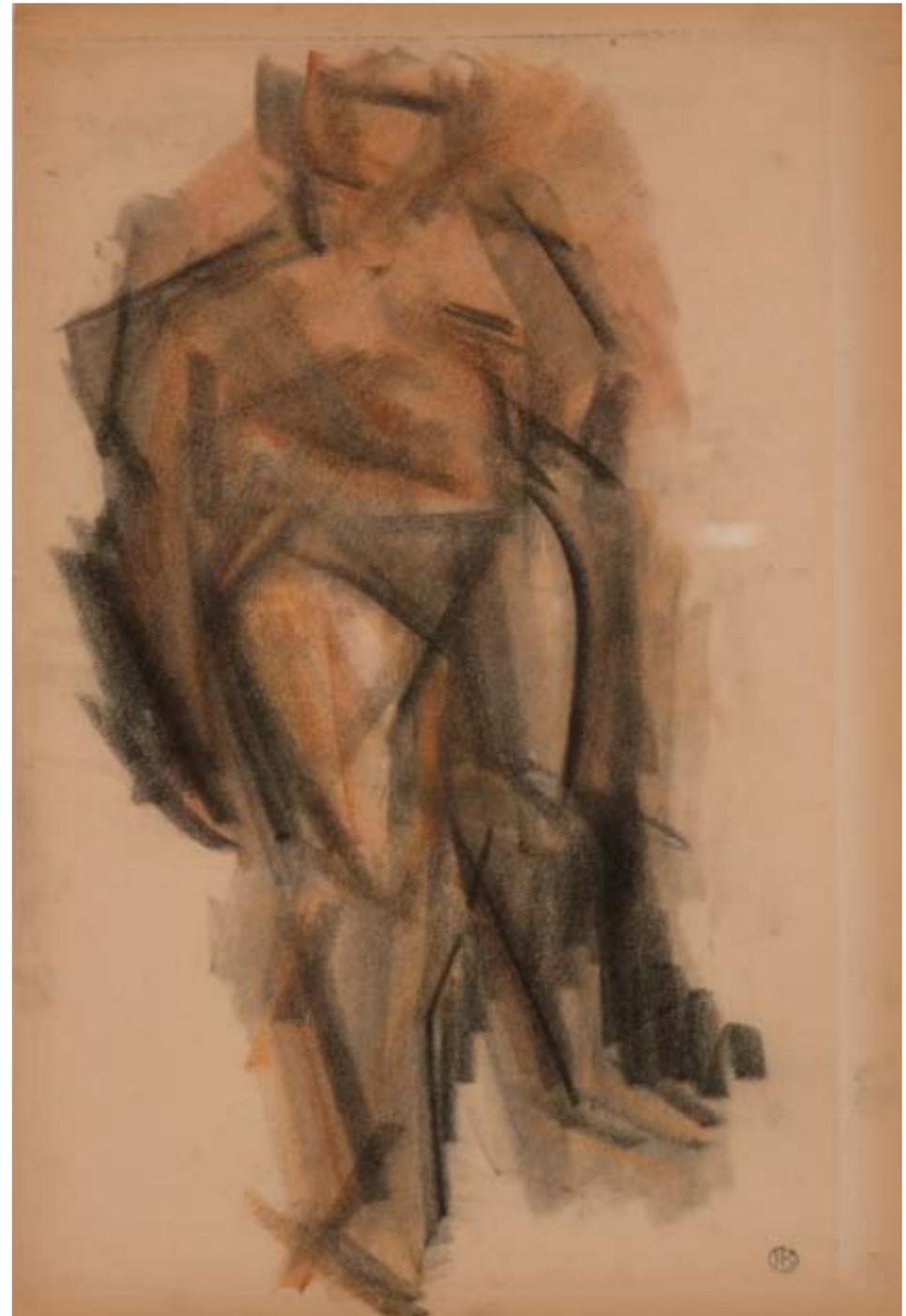
ELMER BISCHOFF, *Two Dancing Dogs*, 1965, mixed media on paper, 14 x 17 inches

When I opened the gallery I got talking to Bill Brown about Jim Weeks. I said, "I'd really like to have a show of Jim's." I wrote Jim and he was very unenthusiastic. He didn't know me. He was no longer showing with anyone in Los Angeles. He had been with Felix Landau, but Felix had broken up that gallery and was divorced. I got Bill Brown to call Jim Weeks and give me a plug. I then called Jim later, we talked, and we agreed to do a show. So I had a show just before that exhibition of his that traveled in 1978. It started at Brandeis University in Massachusetts and went from there to the Oakland Museum. Everything that was in the Oakland show — everything not owned by individual lenders — was put in storage. I could tap into any of those whenever I wanted and show them.



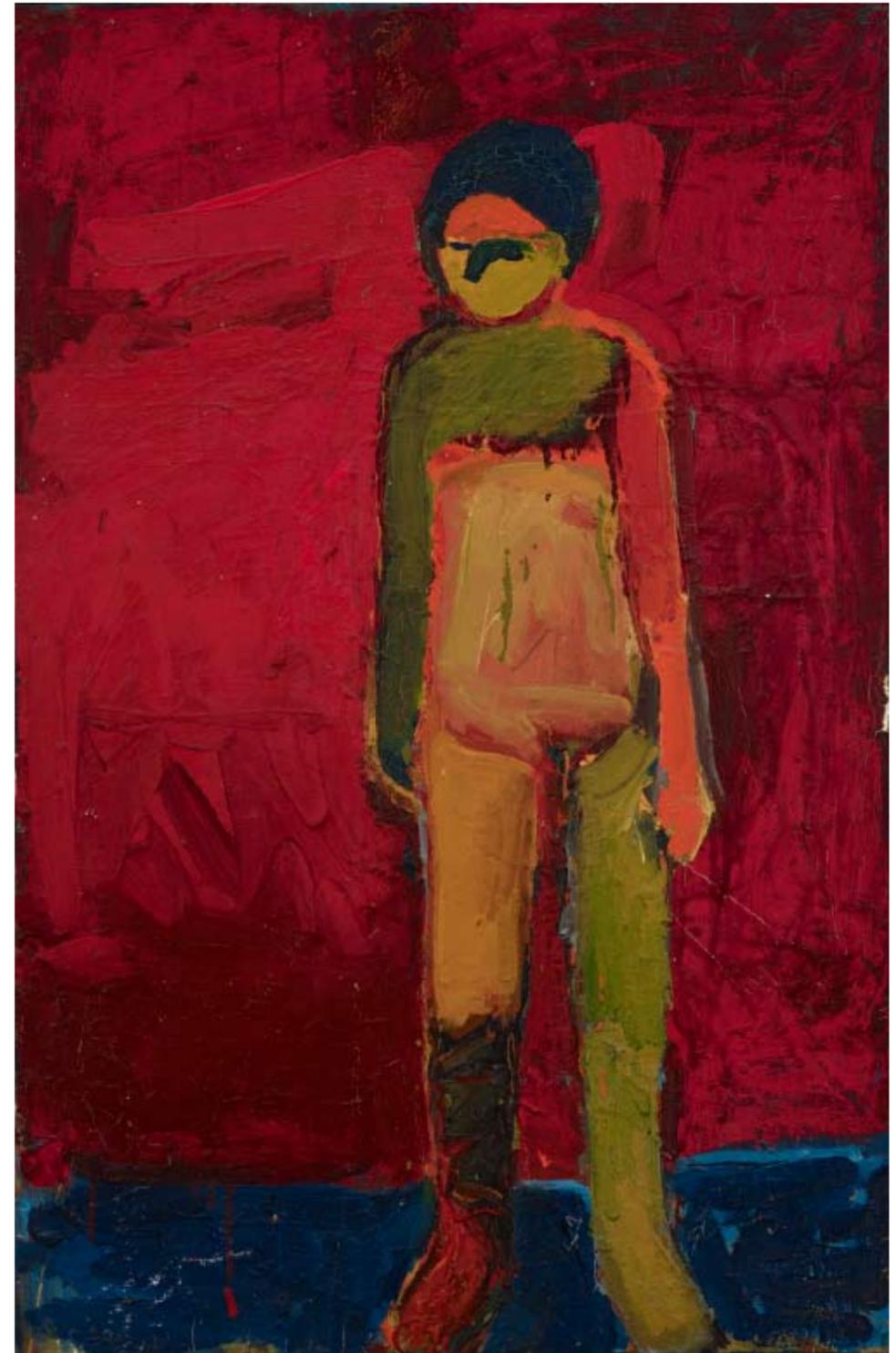
JAMES WEEKS, *Morning Coffee*, 1967, charcoal on paper, 23 x 17 inches

I saw a lot of work that came in to be framed and started buying things I liked, like the Harry Bowden painting I have at home. It's the first painting I ever got, but I still have it and I still like it. I remember it was \$125, and I gave Harry some money. He was a jazz fan. I gave him Jelly Roll Morton records that I had duplicates of. He liked the brand of color I was carrying, Lefebvre-Foinet, which he had used before the war. I was the only one in town who carried it. So I traded him tubes of paint.



HARRY BOWDEN, *Untitled Drawing*, mixed media on paper, 18 x 12 inches

I knew Joan Brown slightly. She sent someone to ask if I would be interested in showing her work. So I called her up and went out to see her in her home. We were talking and I saw some paintings on her wall. I said, "Who did these?" And she said, "Gordon Cook, my husband." Gordon was not home. He was due home in half an hour. He came in, we got talking and hit it off very well. Ended up we did a Gordon Cook show before Joan's show. I think in 1973 I started showing Gordon, and then, subsequently, Joan.



JOAN BROWN, *Self Portrait*, 1958, oil on panel, 33 x 22 inches



GORDON COOK, *Three Olives*, 1982, watercolor, 5.5 x 7.25 inches



GORDON COOK, *El Toro*, 1980, oil on canvas, 12 x 12 inches



FRANK LOBDELL, *Reclining Nude*, 1967, ink wash drawing, 14 x 17 inches



FRANK LOBDELL, *Untitled Nude*, 1967, ink wash drawing, 12 x 16 inches

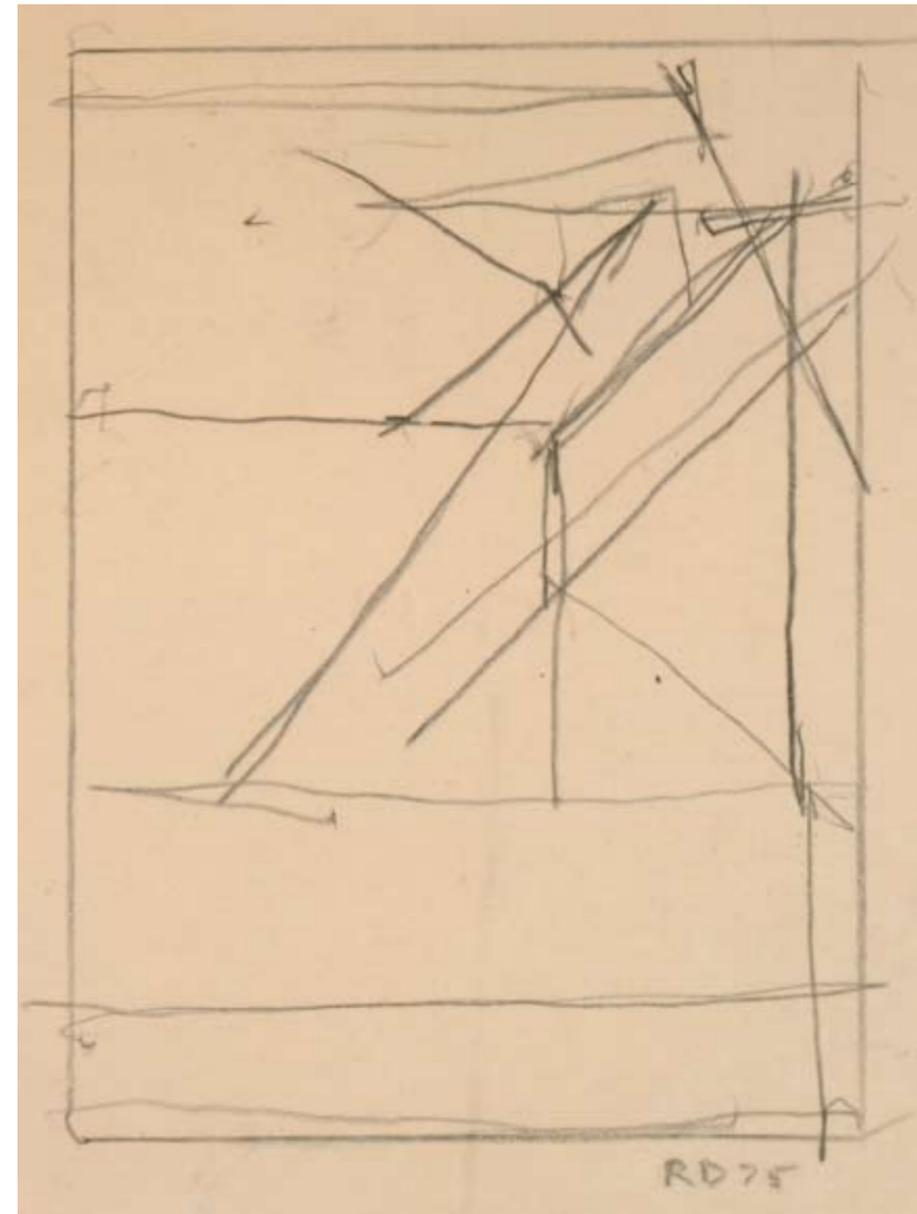


CHARLES GRIFFIN FARR, *Untitled City Scene*, gouache, 20 x 15.5 inches



CHARLES GRIFFIN FARR, *Watermelon, Knife and Plates*, 1971, oil on canvas, 19 x 27.5 inches

Both painting and jazz have to do with improvisation. Jazz musicians are improvisers, and of course painters are. They're always working on paintings and changing them. A classic example is Diebenkorn, who would see a drawing of his which had long been out of his possession, and he would want to do something to change it. He came to our house and saw a little pencil sketch of an Ocean Park painting and said, "I wish I hadn't put that line down there."



RICHARD DIEBENKORN, *Ocean Park Study*, 1975, graphite on paper, 8.5 x 6.5 inches

Nate Oliveira introduced me to Wayne at the Art Institute one day in the late '60s. How we really got to be friends was through Betty Jean Thiebaud, who's a filmmaker. She was doing a documentary on Nate and was here filming the first exhibition I had of Nate's paintings. We were casually hanging paintings and she and my first wife Esther got to be very close friends. They both came from within 30 miles of each other in Missouri.

Then at one time the Thiebauds would come down to San Francisco from Sacramento, their permanent residence, and they'd stay in a hotel. A few times we got them to stay with us at our house, and they liked Potrero Hill. They started looking around and found a little house on the hill they bought. It's like two minutes away from our house. At least twice a month we entertain back and forth.



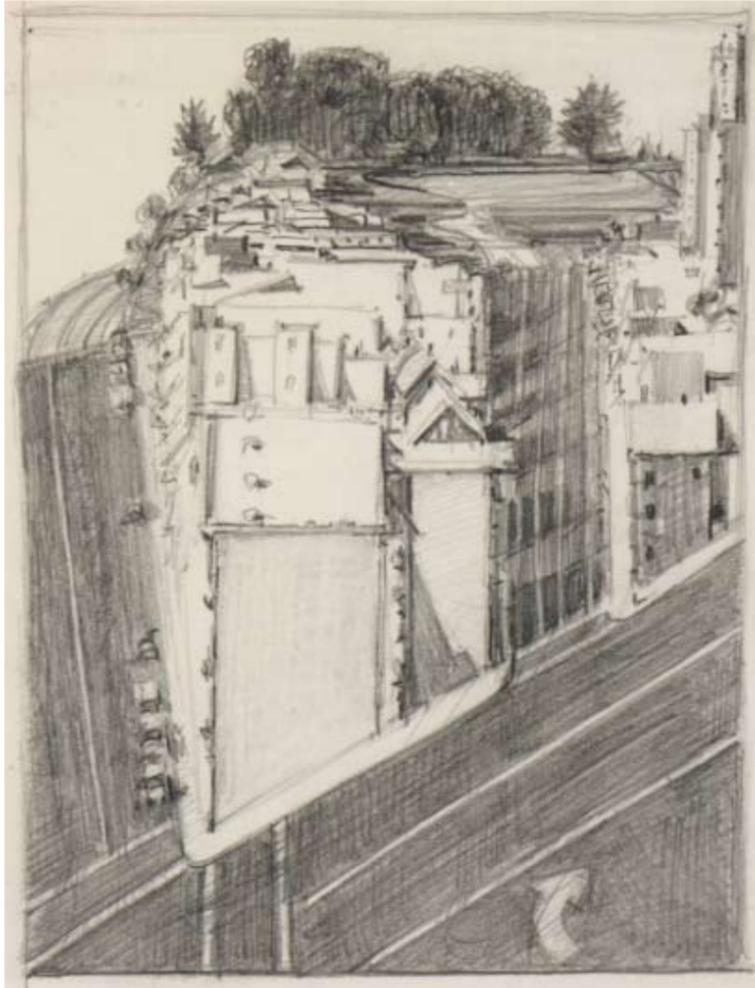
WAYNE THIEBAUD, *Sugar Cones*, 1964/1985, watercolor over drypoint and hardground etching, 4 x 5 inches

In the late '70s, I was very good friends with the Thiebauds, Wayne and Betty Jean. And I got to know their kids, Matt and Paul. Paul was getting interested in the art world. He was not an artist and realized he was not going to be one. Paul got a job at Christie's in New York. I saw him there, and he would come back here. One time he and Wayne and I were at dinner in a restaurant. Paul indicated he didn't want to stay with Christie's in New York. He said, "I'm really a California type. I'm interested in athletics and tennis and all that, and I want to move back. I said, "If you want to go into the gallery business, why don't you come in with me?" He said, "Oh, that would be good," but nothing happened.

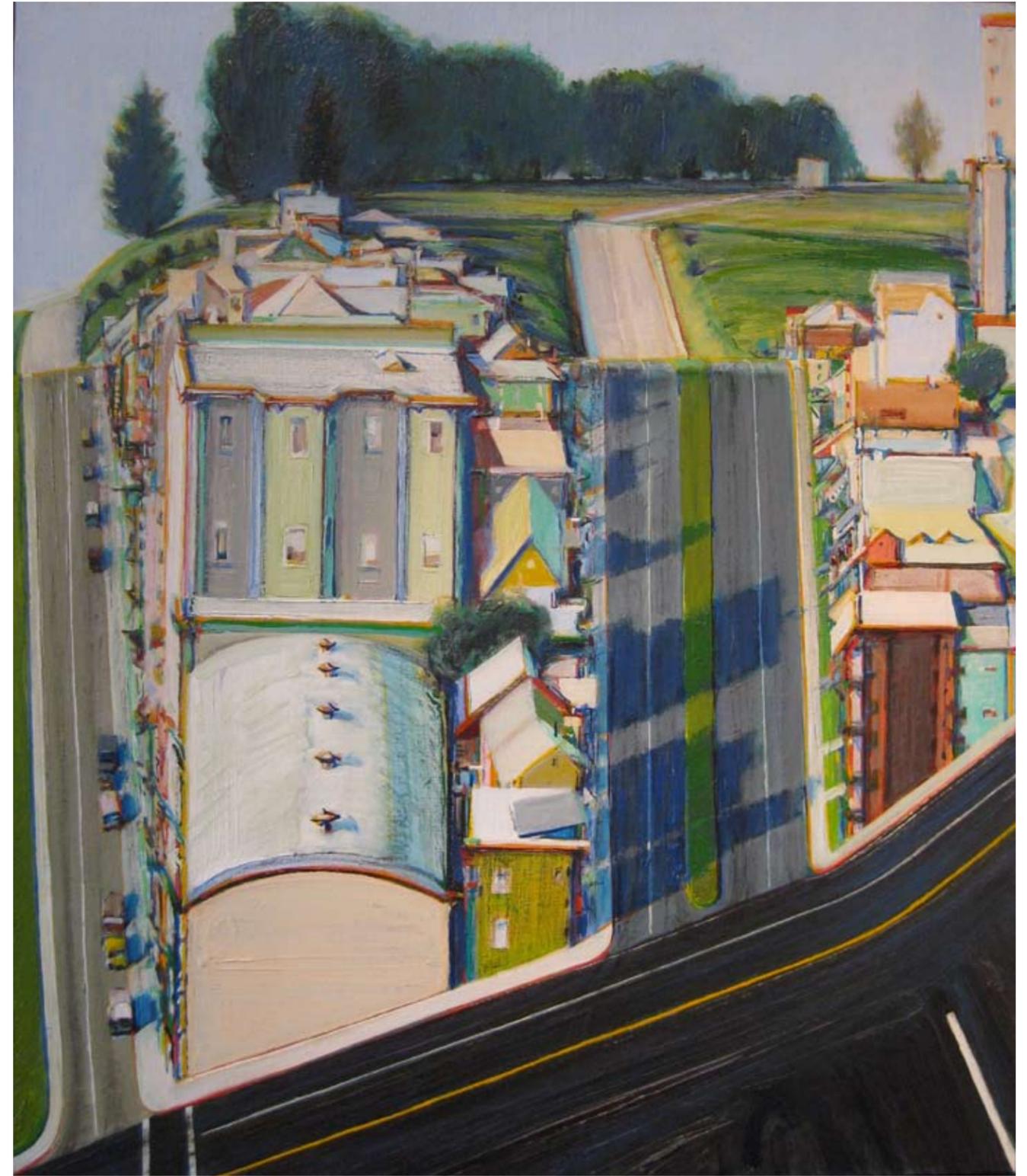
He had been acting as a private dealer, selling prints, living in Sacramento and coming down here and seeing clients and selling stuff out of his station wagon. He realized this was not the thing to do forever. So one day he called up and said, "I'm ready. Let's be partners." I gave the girls in the frame shop notice, and they ultimately moved out, and we remodeled the downstairs the way it looks now, pretty much. Paul came in 1989.



WAYNE THIEBAUD, *Fish Circle*, 1973, pastel, 8.75 x 14.75 inches



WAYNE THIEBAUD, *Holly Park Ridge Study*, 1979, graphite on paper, 6 x 4.5 inches



WAYNE THIEBAUD, *Holly Park Ridge*, 1980, oil on canvas, 26 x 22 inches

I was in New York in Allan Stone's gallery and I saw these figure paintings that reminded me of Oliveira or Giacometti — solitary figures — and Allan says, "Why don't you give this guy a show?" I said something about shipping costs and he said, "He lives in San Francisco!" It turns out Charles Eckart lived at Leavenworth and Lombard and had a studio on Folsom near Eighth. So we got to be friends and I gave him a show, and continued to show his work.

Then about five or six years ago he and his wife had bought some property in Point Reyes and it came to the point where they could build a house. They live out there now, five minutes outside of Point Reyes Station, a terrific house and studio. We kidded, "No more figure work — you'll be doing landscapes." He said, "Oh no, no landscapes."



CHARLES ECKART, *Man Gesturing*, 1984, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches



We were going to do a Rustin show, but the whole art world collapsed. It's a very tough kind of painting for the average person. Many people look at him and just turn away in disgust. But I like them, and I like Rustin. A sweet guy.

There's a disturbing element to them, a little bit like Francis Bacon. Bacon saw the proofs of a book on Rustin at an auction at Sotheby's and said, "Send me the book, I want to look at it. Where has this man been? I've never heard of him." Well, nobody had heard of him. He's very reclusive. He's French. He lives in a poor section of Paris.

JEAN RUSTIN, *Portrait d'homme sur fond sombre*, 1987, oil on canvas, 16 x 16 inches

Glastonberry Gallery was on Hayes Street, and Liathan Cook, by then Gordon Cook's wife, ran the gallery. She relied on Gordon to help her pick and choose. Mary Robertson brought some stuff in and Liathan put her into a group show. I saw the show and bought a painting, so she came to see me. Those paintings were Morandi-like. I liked them very much.

She had two so-called lessons with Gordon about her painting. She said later, "In those couple of hours, he taught me more about what not to paint than what I should do. His advice was don't do this, don't do that; stick to this, to what you're doing. It was just great advice."

We've had a show every year and a half now for 10 years. Most of her work is based on what she sees around where she lives on the Russian River.



MARY ROBERTSON, *Umbrella*, circa 1986, watercolor, 5.5 x 4.75 inches



MARY ROBERTSON, *Marker Under Bridge*, 1988, oil on canvas, 8 x 8 inches



MARY ROBERTSON, *Two People, Odd Fellows*, 2002, oil on canvas, 12 x 12 inches



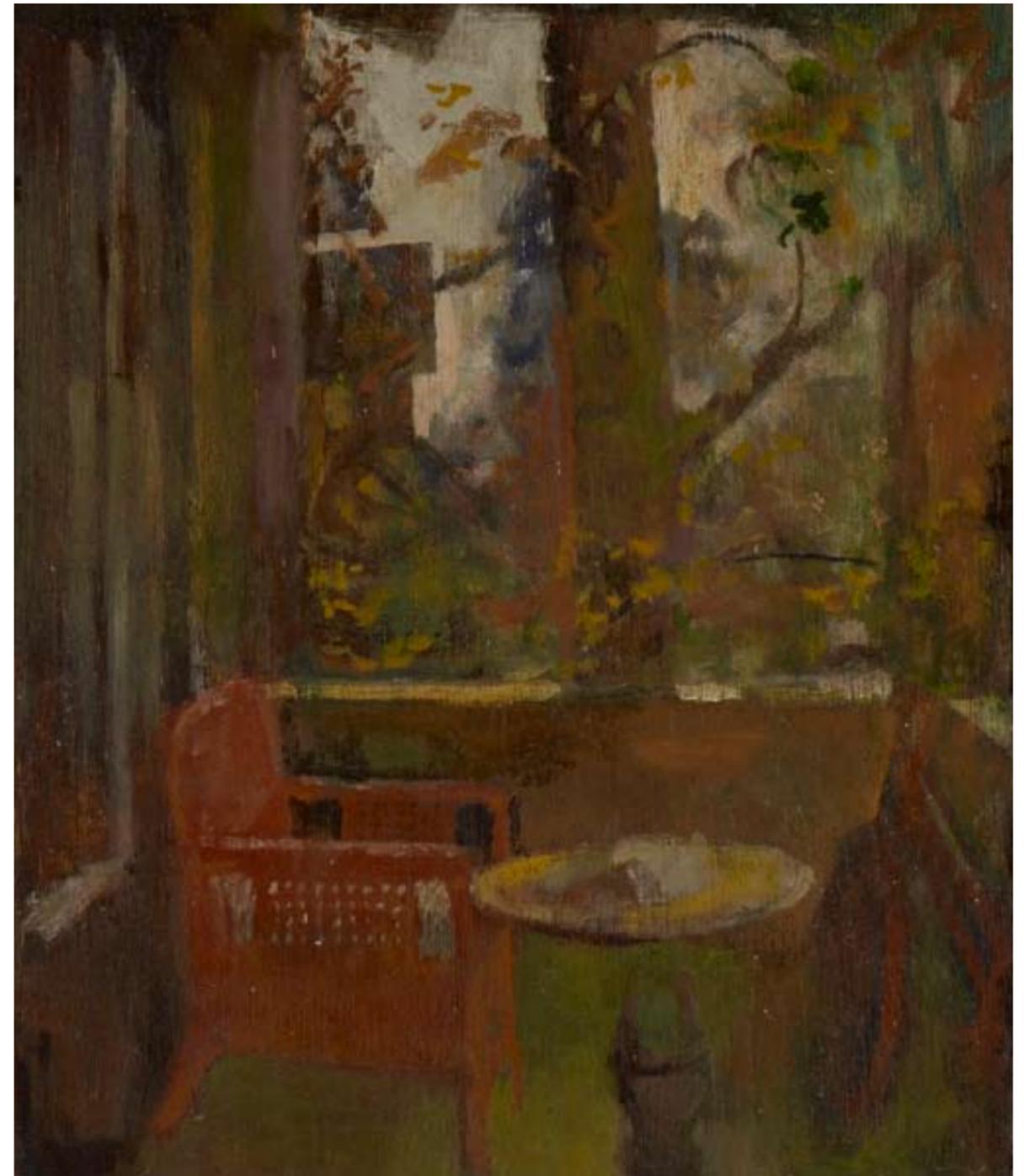
CHARLES BRADY, *Envelope*, oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches



DAVID LEVINE, *High Tide Rocks*, 1989, watercolor, 9.25 x 12.5 inches



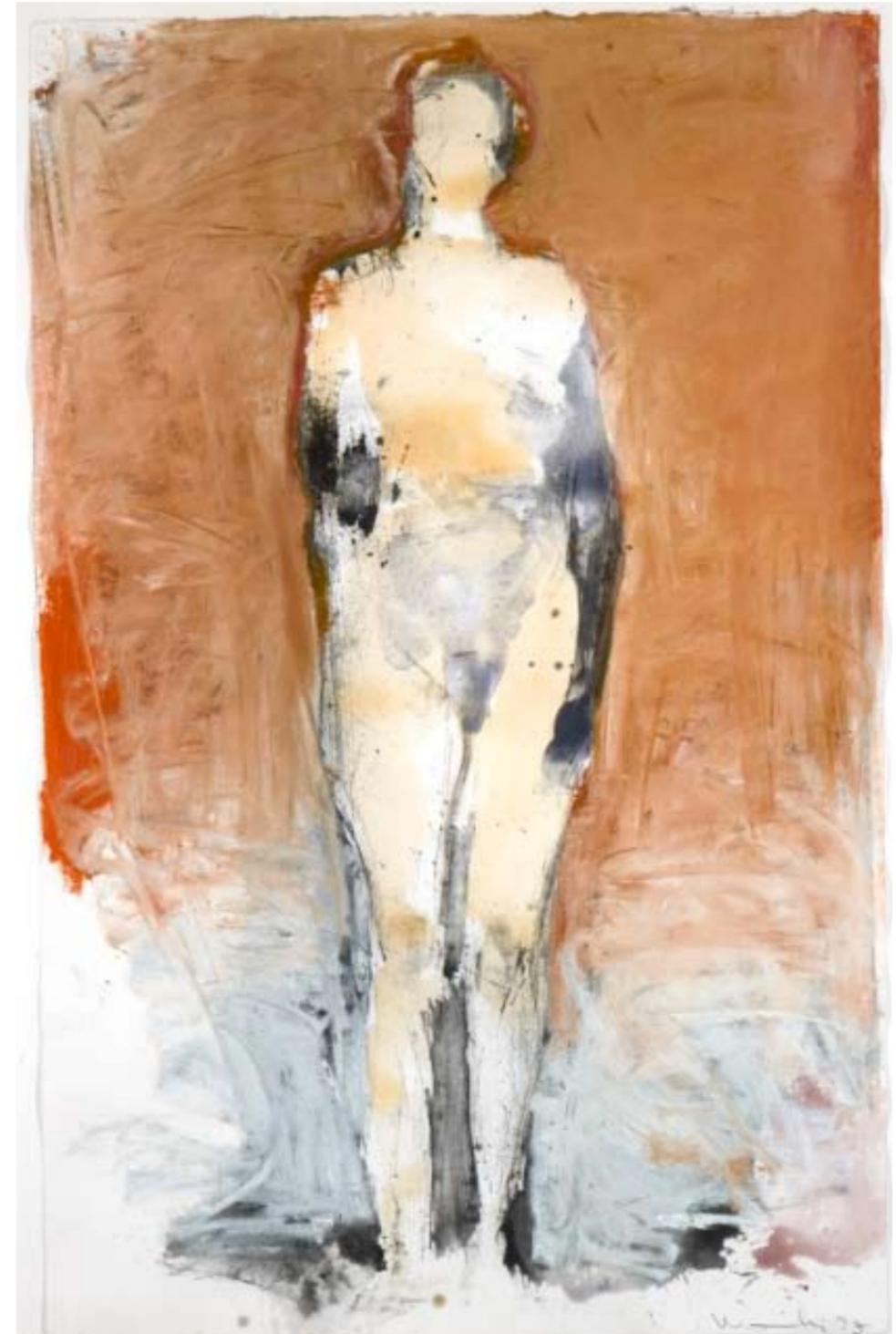
DENNIS HARE, *Waiting*, 1989, oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches



WILLIAM ROSE, *The Red Chair*, 1992, oil on wood panel, 12 x 10 inches



FRANK LOBDELL, *10.11.93*, 1993, mixed media on paper, 17 x 21 inches



MANUEL NERI, *Untitled (Orange Figure)*, 1993, mixed media on paper, 40 x 26 inches

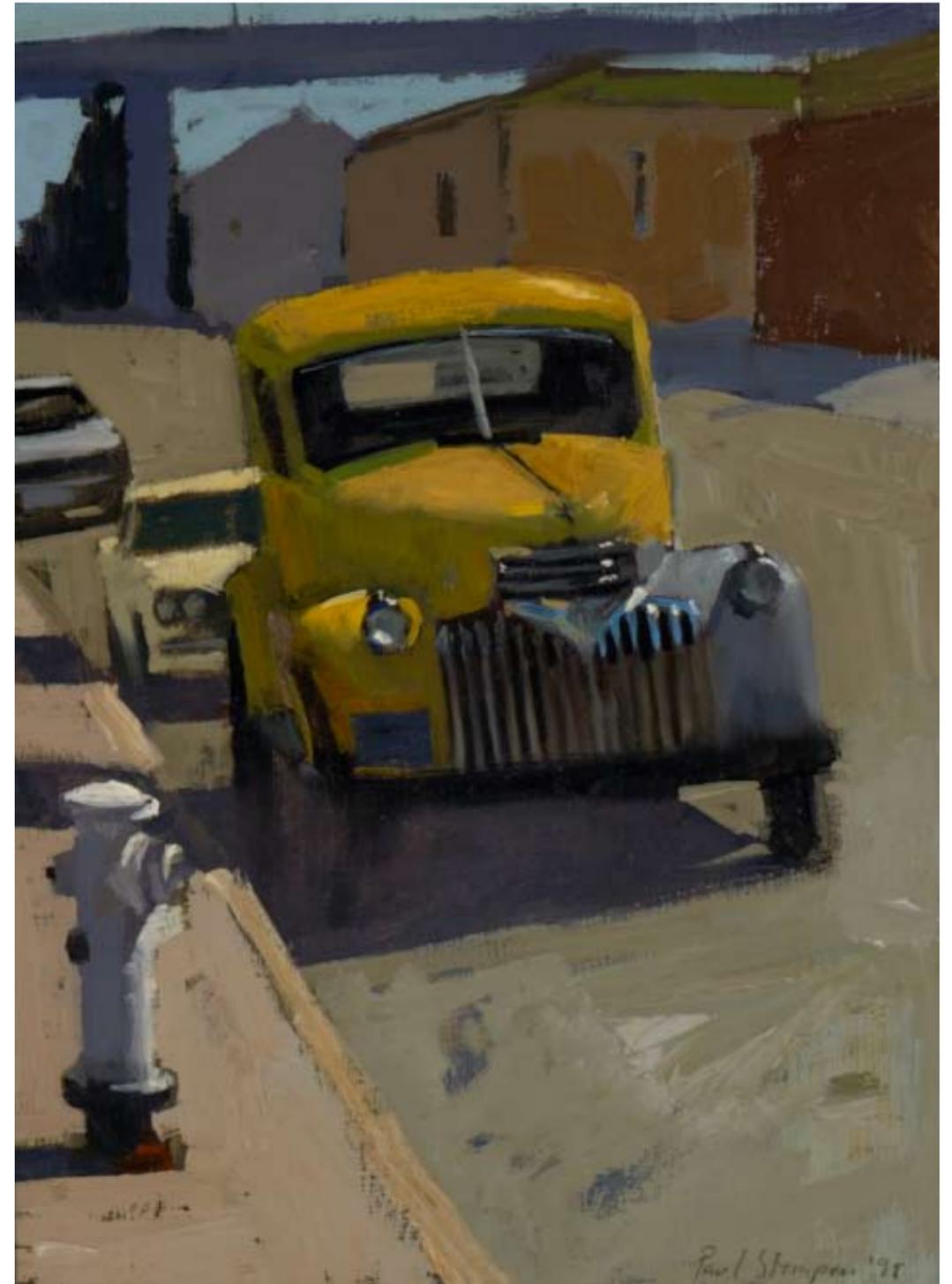


“Instead of a pristine cubicle, there was a kind of warm living room. Our status as art students opened doors to conversation with Charles, who was more than happy to have us share his passion for discoveries. Things kept appearing out of back closets and cabinet drawers that we’d seen in books and catalogs, but with stories attached that made his connection to them personal. He showed us everything: contemporary paintings, Mexican retablos and ex votos, Native American drawings, even his high school yearbook from Shanghai. By the time we left, we’d had a six-course, five-star feast for the soul.”

— MICHAEL TOMPKINS



PAUL STEPEN, *Fireboat*, 1997, oil on panel, 9 x 12 inches



PAUL STEPEN, *Yellow Truck*, 1998, oil on panel, 12 x 9 inches

I always felt, look, I'll put up what I think is the best stuff and you come and look at it and make your own decision. Basically there's no difference between what we take on for the gallery and what we take for our own collection. It has to meet that same sort of personal standard. It's not a case where you see an artist or a body of work that you know is going to sell fast, that you take on for the gallery, if you don't think highly of it yourself. There's a sort of rule I have that I don't want to show anything in the gallery that I wouldn't want to have at home. That's not always possible. But we try to do that.

I've always had stuff in the back room, a little bit of everything from everywhere. Some people take one look at it and flee, and others just like what they see. It's a good mix.

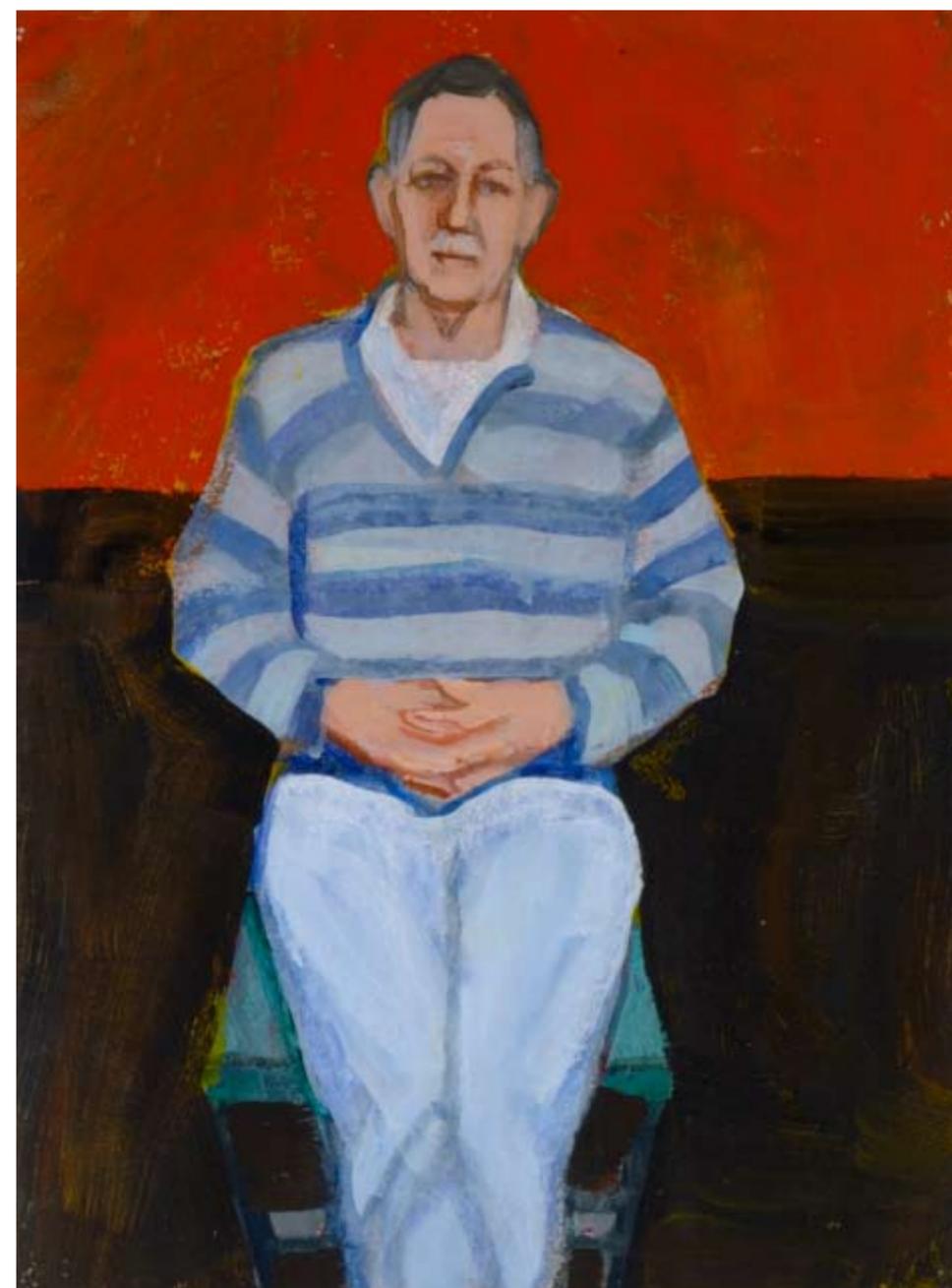
I look at things and get them because I like them — if it really hits me right now, if I look and it's an immediate gut feeling. In fact, the things I regret are the decisions I've made to wait a week, to think about it, and then when I decide, I can't get it. It's gone. But God, the feeling of I want that, I want it right now, I'll go into debt — which I've done. Rarely have I regretted what I've bought. But I have regretted things I should have bought but didn't.



FRED DALKEY, *Untitled Figure*, 1998, conte crayon, 7 x 9 inches



PAUL WONNER, *Bathers*, watercolor and pencil, 12 x 9 inches



WILLIAM THEOPHILUS BROWN, *Paul*, 1999, acrylic on paper, 12 x 8.75 inches



ED MUSANTE, *Barn Owl / White Owl*, 2001, mixed media on cigar box, 9 x 6 x 1.5 inches



ED MUSANTE, *Goldfinch / Partagas*, 2010, mixed media on cigar box, 8.75 x 5.75 x 2.25 inches

Then Al Putt died and my wife Esther died. I had known Glenna since I first opened the frame shop in 1947. She was going to move in and I said, "Christ, we might as well make it legal." Our wedding in 1988 in Katmandu could not have stood up under IRS scrutiny. My sister was living in Reno, so we went up there and took her to Virginia City. She was our witness. So we have a paper. But as Glenna says, the wedding by the Hindu priest felt more like being married. It was pretty impressive.

Glenna had made a couple of trips to India before. She met an American mountain climber who had started the Peace Corps in Nepal. She broached this, about getting married in Nepal. He said, "Well, my Nepalese partner is still there. He's a terrific guy. I'll write him." So when we got to Nepal we called him and he had everything all set up. He'd arranged for the priest and everything. His daughter was going to Stanford. Incredible! So the daughter, when all these things were being said, she'd whisper some English translation.



GLENN PUTT, *Charlie Listening to Music*, 2000, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF CHARLES CAMPBELL

- Born to second generation gold miners in 1915 on a chicken ranch in Santa Cruz, California.
- Lived in Siberia as a child until the family gold mine was seized during the Russian Revolution.
- Moved to China and grew up in Shanghai.
- In Los Angeles, became an early jazz fan and was pianist Art Tatum's chauffeur.
- Moved to San Francisco in 1947 and opened the Louvre frame shop and art supply store on Chestnut Street near what is now the San Francisco Art Institute.
- Met and sold supplies to emerging Bay Area Figurative artists and began to exhibit their work.
- Opened the Charles Campbell Gallery in 1972.
- Married the artist Glenna Putt in Katmandu, Nepal, in 1988.
- Formed the Campbell-Thiebaud Gallery in 1989 in partnership with Paul Thiebaud, son of painter Wayne Thiebaud, for a decade.
- Closed his gallery in April 2008 and retired at age 93.
- At 97, remains enthusiastic about good art, jazz and wine.